



Grammar of
POETRY

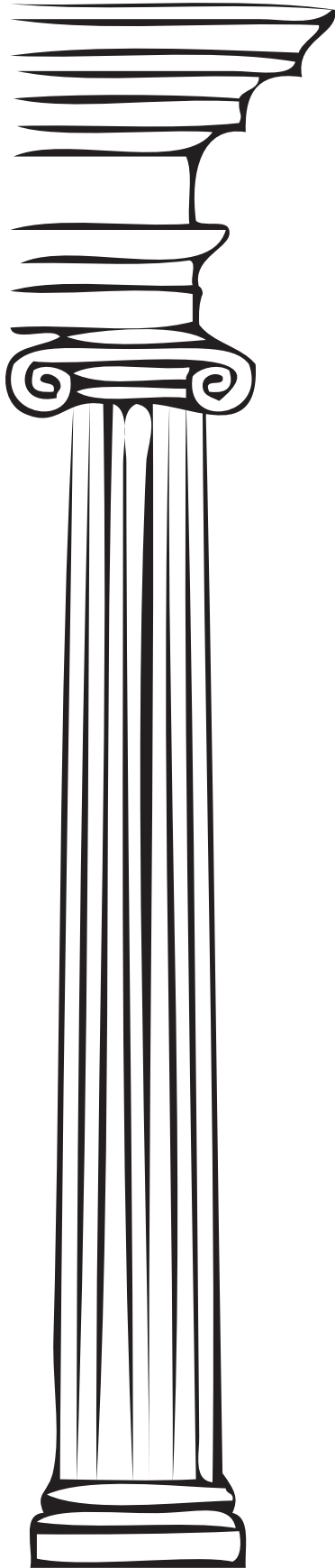
Matt Whitling

GRAMMAR
OF POETRY
STUDENT EDITION

Matt Whitling

Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
More than cool reason ever comprehends.
The lunatic, the lover, and the poet
Are of imagination all compact:—
One sees more devils than vast hell can hold, —
That is the madman: the lover, all as frantic,
Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt:
The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
And, as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.
Such tricks hath strong imagination,
That, if it would but apprehend some joy,
It comprehends some bringer of that joy;
Or in the night, imagining some fear,
How easy is a bush supposed a bear!

—Shakespeare
A Midsummer Night's Dream



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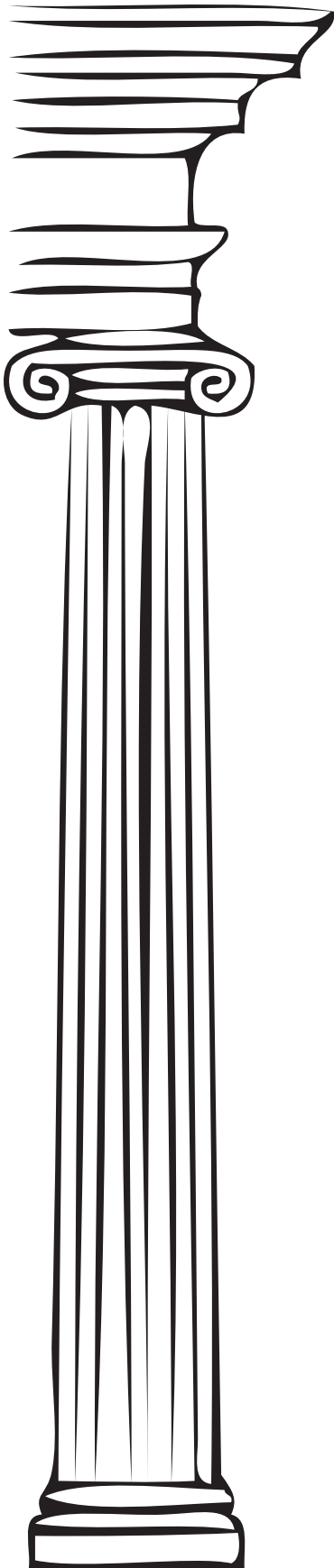
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PREFACE

A DEFENSE OF THE CLASSICAL TOOL OF IMITATION

Scripture commands us to imitate the Lord Jesus Christ. We are also commanded to imitate those brothers and sisters who, through faith and patience, have inherited the promises. To imitate something or someone means:

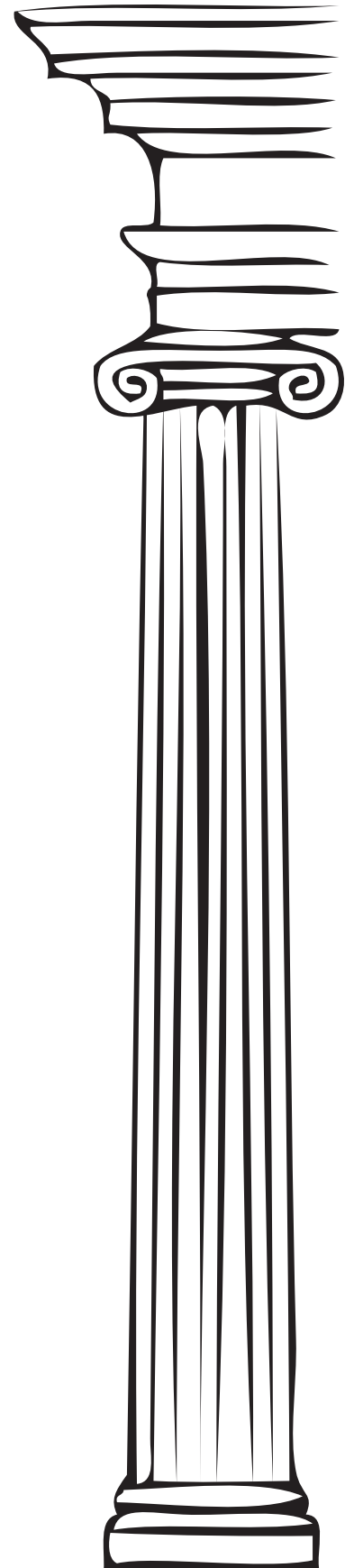
- To do or try to do after the manner of; to follow the example of; to copy in action.
- To make or produce a copy or presentation of; to copy, reproduce.
- To be, become, or make oneself like; to assume the aspect or semblance of; to simulate.

This God-sanctioned method of learning is an essential tool for educating young people. Consider how we go about teaching a child to perform skills such as throwing and catching.

“Hold your hands like this,” we say. “Step forward as you throw like this.”
“Look at this ‘A’. Trace this letter. Now, you try to make an ‘A’ like this one.”

This is imitation, and it extends beyond writing. At Logos School, for example, students learn how to paint by imitating master painters of the past. “Students, this is a good painting. Let’s see if you can reproduce it.” Regardless of whether we are teaching music, reading, or math, imitation very often provides the best starting block in instruction in any of these areas.

Educators in seventeenth century England valued imitation as a tool to teach style, particularly in the area of writing. These English grammar schools primarily employed a method of imitation called the Double Translation.



Consider these steps that were used in a Double Translation after the teacher translated a Latin work into English:

1. The student copied the English translation over paying close attention to every word and its significance.
2. The student wrote the English and Latin together one above the other making each language answer to the other.
3. The student translated the original Latin to English on his own. (This was part one of the Double Translation).
4. Ten days later the student was given his final English translation and required to turn it back into good Latin.

Benjamin Franklin wrote of a similar exercise that he employed to educate himself a century later. As a young man, he came across a particular piece of writing that he delighted in, *The Spectator*, a series of 555 popular essays published in 1711 and 1712. These essays were intended to improve manners and morals, raise the cultural level of the middle-class reader, and popularize serious ideas in science and philosophy. These well written essays contained a style Franklin felt eager to emulate. Here Franklin explains his method of “double translation” regarding *The Spectator*:

“With the view (imitating this great work) I took some of the papers, and making short hints of the sentiments in each sentence, laid them by a few days, and when, without looking at the book, tried to complete these papers again, by expressing each hinted sentiment at length, and as fully as it had been expressed before, in any suitable words that should occur to me. Then I compared my *Spectator* with the original, discovered some of my faults, and corrected them.”

He became aware of his need for a greater stock of words in order to add variety and clarity of thought to his writing.

“Therefore I took some of the tales in the *Spectator*, and turned them into verse; and, after a time, when I had pretty well forgotten the prose, turned them back again. I also sometimes jumbled my collection of hints into confusion, and after some weeks endeavored to reduce them into the best order, before I began to form the sentences and complete the subject. This was to teach me method in the arrangement of thoughts. By comparing my work with the original, I discovered many faults and corrected them; but I sometimes had the pleasure to fancy that, in particulars of small consequence, I had been fortunate enough to improve the method or the language, and this encouraged me to think that I might in time become to be a tolerable English writer, of which I was extremely ambitious.”

This Imitation In Writing series seeks to provide instruction in writing using the classical tool of imitation. As we begin imitation in poetry, we will employ a similar method to what Franklin described. We will find poems of truth, beauty, and goodness and emulate them, and maybe if we’re diligent, we might in time become tolerable writers, too.

LESSON ONE

INTRODUCTION

POETRY

is a language
of pictures
and music.

TROPE

is a
specific fig-
ure of speech.

The music of poetry
contains two parts

METER & RHYME.

This book consists of nine modules. In each module we will typically study one trope, one element of meter, and then do an imitation. This will give you the opportunity to master each poetic element as you add to your knowledge incrementally.

WHAT IS POETRY?

Although poetry can be defined in many different ways, for our purposes, we will define poetry as a language of pictures and music. A good writer paints pictures with his words in figurative language. A specific figure of speech is called a **trope**. Think of tropes as the pictures poets paint with words. Poetry uses meter as the music presenting the pictures. The music of poetry contains two parts: **meter** and **rhyme**. Meter and rhyme combine to produce the lilting sound and rhythm that most poems contain.

EPIPHANY CHART

In order to write a good poem, you will need to have a meaningful topic to write about. The epiphany chart will help you organize your topics. The word epiphany means to “show” or “reveal.” By completing the chart, you will be listing items that show or reveal something significant about you.

In the columns on the next page, fill each section with as many ideas as you can:

- **High Points** – the best things that have ever happened to you (success, honor, happiness, etc.)
- **Low Points** – the worst things that have ever happened to you (injuries, failures, embarrassing moments, etc.)
- **Turning Points** – events that have changed you in some way (a lesson you learned, an idea that finally “clicked,” etc.)
- **Special People** (relatives, friends, heroes, historical characters, etc.)
- **Special Places** (home, vacation spot, etc.)
- **Special Possessions** (books, games, toys, weapons, etc.)

LESSON TWO

HOW TO READ POETRY

THANKFULNESS IN POETRY

Avid poetry readers grow into good poets. Reading lots of great poetry will not be much fun unless you enjoy it; this brings up a very important point. Whenever you begin to study something for the first time, you have a choice to make. Are you going to like this subject and relish it, or will it be sour to your taste and drive you away? You will find in your study of poetry, as in other subjects, if you determine to set your affections upon it from the beginning, you will have a delightful time learning to read and write poetry along the way.

When it is time to study poetry during the course of your week, think of it as a time in which you get to learn poetry instead of a time when you have to. In order to do this, choose to be thankful for the chance to learn about poetry. Poetry will not always be easy, but thankfulness and perseverance as you study will bring you greater learning and enjoyment. In short, teach yourself to love poetry.

READING POETRY

In this lesson you will learn how to *read*, *memorize*, and *recite* poetry that interests you. The first thing you should do, when you attempt a poem, is to read the title. This might seem too obvious to point out, but consider for a moment the importance of the title.

Often, in poetry, the title contains information that must be understood in order for the reader to comprehend the poem. The title might contain the *setting* of the poem, the time in which the poem takes place, or the name of a person the poem describes. After reading the title, guessing what the poem is about helps you to understand the title more fully. Then, read the poem quietly to yourself. As you read it, try to figure out how the poem should sound.

POETRY

read,
memorize,
and recite

The **TITLE**
often contains info that
must be understood in
order for the reader to
comprehend the poem.

SETTING

is the time in
which the poem
takes place.

Just like in prose, when you read poetry, you pay attention to the punctuation. You shouldn't stop at the end of a line. Poetry, like music, has a distinct rhythm or beat that you need to detect. Finally, read the poem aloud, this time paying very close attention to what the poem means.

Here are the steps again:

- STEP ONE: Read the **title** and guess what the poem is about.
 ► The title is the key that unlocks the meaning of the poem.
- STEP TWO: Read the poem silently to yourself to detect the **rhythm**.
 ► Where should the beats be?
- STEP THREE: Read the poem out loud to determine the **meaning**.
 ► Pay attention to the punctuation.

When considering the poem's meaning, it is helpful to think in terms of *poetic categories*. These categories are based on the main subject or theme of the poem. Ask yourself what the poem was about. Most poems will naturally fall into at least one of the categories listed below. Of course, some poems will be a combination of the categories. Many historical poems tell a story resulting in what is called an *historical narrative*. If the story is a funny one, it could be described as a humorous historical narrative. If you are able to detect the type(s) of poetry you are reading, it helps you to understand its meaning.

POETIC CATEGORIES

NARRATIVE POETRY	Poems that tell stories
NATURE POETRY	Poems about creation
LOVE POETRY	Poems that sing of friendship or romantic love
DESCRIPTIVE POETRY	Poems that explain or describe something
HISTORICAL POETRY	Poems about countries, peoples, wars, etc.
RELIGIOUS POETRY	Poems about God or man's relationship with Him
HUMOROUS POETRY	Poems to make you laugh

PRACTICE

Read the following poems using all three steps described on the facing page, and then label the poetic category.

POETIC CATEGORY:

THE OWL AND THE FOX

There was an old Fox
 That lived under the rocks
 At the foot of the huge oak tree;
 And of all of the foxes
 That ever did live
 There was none so bad as he.
 His step was soft,
 With his padded feet,
 But his claws were sharp beneath;
 And sharp were his eyes,
 And sharp were his ears,
 And sharp were his terrible teeth.

And the dreariest place
 You ever did see,
 Was this old Fox's den;
 It was strewn with the down
 Of the tender Chick,
 And the quills of the mother hen,
 Where he dragged them in
 This dismal den
 And piled their bones together,
 And killed them dead,
 And sucked their blood,
 And ate their flesh,
 And picked their bones,
 And warmed his bed with the feathers...

– Unknown

POETIC CATEGORY:

FRAGMENT

Flower in the crannied wall,
 I pluck you out of the crannies,
 I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
 Little flower – but if I could understand
 What you are, root and all, and all in all,
 I should know what God and man is.

– Alfred Tennyson

POETIC CATEGORY:

AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL

O beautiful for spacious skies,
 For amber waves of grain,
 For purple mountain majesties
 Above the fruited plain!
 America! America!
 God shed His grace on thee
 And crown thy good with brotherhood
 From sea to shining sea!

– Katherine Lee Bates

POETIC CATEGORY:

TRINITY SUNDAY

Lord, who hast form'd me out of the mud,
And hast redeem'd me through thy blood,
And sanctifi'd me to do good;

Purge all my sins done heretofore:
For I confess my heavy sore,
And I will strive to sin no more.

Enrich my heart, mouth, hands in me,
With faith, with hope, with charity;
That I may run, rise, rest with thee.

-George Herbert

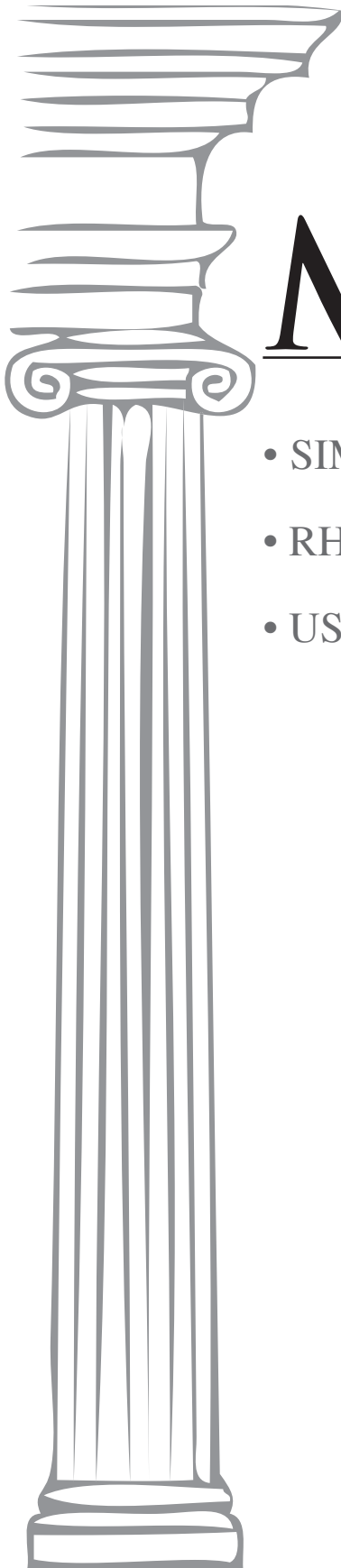
POETIC CATEGORY:

SONNET XVIII

Shall I compare thee to a Summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And Summer's lease hath all too short a date:
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd:
But thy eternal Summer shall not fade
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st:

So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

- William Shakespeare



MODULE I

- SIMILE
- RHYME
- USING A RHYMING DICTIONARY